

accommodate a storeroom for firewood and coal. We contributed to the project by making benches and tables, building two restrooms and installing three sinks. A playground was constructed behind the club with a sandbox, a slide and other play tools. The main premises of the club are used for meetings, weddings and rehearsal of the local children's dance group.

The good cooperation between the MSF team and the local community encouraged us to support some initiatives of the Roma NGOs. The MSF team assisted Roma activists in writing several projects with which they applied before the Phare-LIEN Microprojects Program of the European Commission, and the Civil Society Development Foundation. Two of the applying project were approved and received funding.

Encouraging school attendance

The community board proposed giving free snacks to the kids who go to school in order to motivate them and their parents. Throughout the 1999–2000 school year the 350 students of the local schools received 29,787 snacks (some pastry and a glass of milk or juice). School attendance increased by 10 %.

Since the beginning of the new school year 2000–2001, upon a decision by the Municipal Council, the social services have been giving snacks to all the students whose parents are eligible for social assistance. We reached an agreement with the social services to provide snacks to 173 kids from the Malcho Malchev District who did not meet the formal requirements for such assistance. All food packages were distributed by the social services and all kids received similar snacks. Since the beginning of the school year our organization provided 6,131 snacks.

The successful partnership with the school headmaster and the municipal company delivering the snacks creates conditions for continuing this project through the end of the school year.

Improving the hygiene, the habits and the sexual behavior within the Roma community

Currently there is virtually no house in the Roma community equipped with a bathroom. Moreover, water supply is limited to 4 hours per day for most of the neighborhood. Striving to improve the hygiene of the Roma population and responding to a request by the community council we built four public bathrooms and two restrooms in a section of the local school. The facilities have been working since September 2001 and are being used by quite a few people.

Together with one of the local general practitioners we organized several short seminars on family planning for the local community in which abortions and unwanted births are quite common. The attendance of the seminars, however, was low because Roma are reluctant to publicly discuss such issues, which are still a tabu in their community. Those who did attend were mainly young people with higher than average education for the neighborhood. For the rest of the adults individual work still seems to be the best approach.

Together with two activists from the Roma youth NGO "Nov Put – 98" we organized two family planning lessons for the older students in the local school. The lectures prepared and delivered by the MSF social worker and the two young Roma were held in June 2000 and provoked remarkable interest among the teenagers who discussed these issues quite freely and were eager to speak up.

The two young "lecturers" who were chosen quite fortuitously took the task very seriously and proposed to deliver similar lectures to students in other schools and even in the high schools of Turgovishte. *The fact that we are Gypsies does not mean that we cannot lecture to Bulgarian students.* The MSF team supported them and they did deliver such lectures in one of the secondary schools in town.

(Like most unemployed people, these youngsters are really eager to do something worthwhile in the five days of community work they have to do per month. This inspired us to ask the social services to let them work with us, rather than sweep the streets. We wanted to build